

Case study 3: University of Newcastle Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Research Framework

Weaving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, knowledge and excellence into every aspect of the University of Newcastle

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples bring rich cultural knowledge systems, strong community leadership, and deep resilience to higher education. While systemic barriers—such as underrepresentation, cultural disconnection, and limited access to culturally safe learning environments—continue to shape experiences, there are significant opportunities to build on these strengths. By strengthening representation, creating culturally connected and safe learning environments, and supporting community-led approaches, higher education institutions can foster academic success and broaden social and economic participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Launched in 2021, the University's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Research Framework positions Indigenous self-determination, cultural authority and community partnership as central drivers of excellence across the institution. The framework sets out a comprehensive, whole-of-university strategy built around four key pillars:

- **Cultural Knowledge and Understanding:** embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, perspectives, and cultural practices across teaching, learning, and research.
- **Participation and Retention:** adopting a whole-of-life approach that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement and success in higher education.
- **Research to Influence Change:** advancing research led by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, focused on community priorities, impact and outcomes.
- **Engagement and Community Collaboration for Reconciliation:** strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to foster meaningful collaboration, shared decision-making and respect for cultural authority.

Guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led governance and partnership structures, the Framework embeds self-determination in its design, implementation and evaluation. It also aligns closely with the Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2022–2025.

Community members have affirmed that the University's commitment to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and embedding cultural knowledge is creating a learning environment that is culturally grounded, inclusive and empowering. They highlight that this strengths-based, self-determined approach not only supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to flourish but also enriches the broader University community by deepening cultural understanding.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Enrolments 2020–2025

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Enrolments: the University has seen a significant increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments, reflecting the success of its inclusive strategies.

Year	Total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments	Total number of domestic student enrolments	% of domestic student enrolments that are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
2020	1353	32724	4.13%
2021	1464	33835	4.33%
2022	1420	31471	4.51%
2023	1416	29744	4.76%
2024	1548	30803	5.03%
2025	1607	31276	5.14%

Figure 10. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Enrolments 2020–2025.
Source: 101 - Program Profile (Annual) Power BI Report.
Note: 2025 is year-to-date – as at 26 August 2025.



Figure 11: Celebrating NAIDOC Week at Ourimbah Campus, 2024.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Representation 2020–2025

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Representation: there has been notable growth in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across various roles, enhancing cultural leadership within the institution.

Year	Total number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff	Total number of staff	% of staff cohort that are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
2020	95	3353	2.83%
2021	97	3211	3.02%
2022	101	3133	3.22%
2023	103	3231	3.19%
2024	107	3251	3.29%
2025	118	3611	3.27%

Figure 12. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Representation 2020–2025. Source: Data warehouse (from HR Ascender), 26 August 2025. Ongoing and Fixed Term employment snapshot as at 31 March.

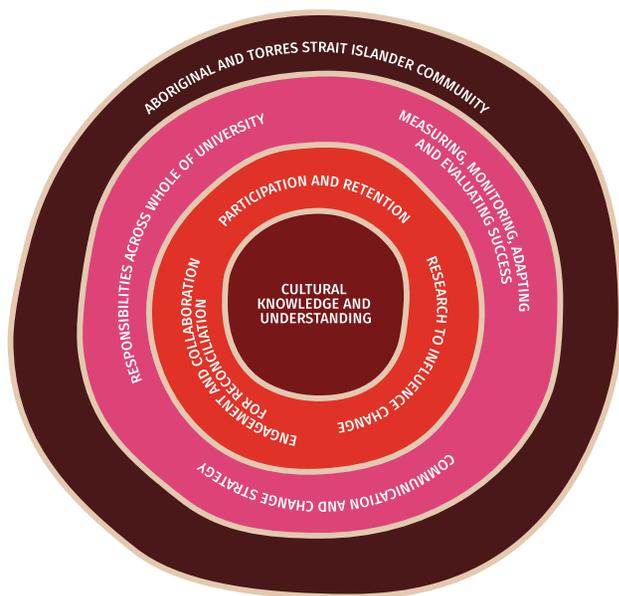


Figure 13. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Research Framework 2020–2025 Diagram 2020, illustrating how cultural knowledge lives at the centre of the Framework and is embedded across the University's relationships, teaching, research and reconciliation efforts.

Scan to learn more
Universities
Australia
Indigenous
Strategy
2022-2025.



Scan to learn more
about the Aboriginal
and Torres Strait
Islander Education and
Research Strategy



Figure 14. Delegates of the International Traditional Indigenous Knowledges Institute, November 2025.
Figure 15. Presenter Simon Munro, and guests at the Umulliko Wollotuka Research Gathering, 2024.
Figure 16. Students viewing the Bulgandry rock art led by Uncle BJ Duncan in Darkinjung Country.
Figure 17. Members of the Wollotuka Men's Group, 2025.